

COVID BLOG

Follow our live coverage for the latest news on the coronavirus pandemic

Australia border rules change as concerns over Omicron variant swell around the world

By Caitlyn Davey
Posted 2h ago



New COVID-19 variant emerges in South Africa

Help keep family & friends informed by sharing this article

abc.net.au/news/omicron-weekend-up...[COPY LINK](#)[SHARE](#)

The Omicron variant — previously known as the South African variant and the B.1.1.529 variant — has been declared a COVID-19 variant of concern by the World Health Organization (WHO) over the weekend.

Some international borders closed, travel guidance changed, the markets took a nosedive, the variant got its official name and the WHO called for calm, all within a few days.

Omicron is the fifth strain of COVID-19 to be designated a variant of concern by the WHO.

While scientists do not know a lot about this strain yet, it is believed to be more transmissible than previous variants.

Here is a rundown of what happened over the weekend:

- Two cases were confirmed in Australia on Sunday
- Australia changed its travel guidance for international arrivals
- Cases were detected in the Netherlands, Italy, Germany, Hong Kong, Belgium, Austria and the United Kingdom
- Many countries closed their borders to southern Africa
- Israel closed its borders to all foreigners
- The WHO called for calm.

LIVE UPDATES: Read our blog for the latest news on the COVID-19 pandemic

Omicron confirmed in Australia

The variant has officially reached Australian shores, with the first cases detected in hotel quarantine in Sydney, [where two overseas travellers tested positive for the variant on Sunday afternoon](#).

Another traveller in quarantine was tested in the Howard Springs facility in Northern Territory after arriving from South Africa.

He tested positive to COVID-19 and the details of his results will be shared in the coming days.

Travel advice for arrivals to Australia changes

Australia has tightened its borders for international arrivals coming from southern African countries.

Any travellers arriving from South Africa, Lesotho, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Namibia, Eswatini, Malawi and the Seychelles must undergo 14 days' quarantine.

In an effort to reduce the spread of the new variant, NSW updated its international travel regulations for arrivals from southern Africa.

Anyone arriving in the state from the nine impacted southern African countries is now required to go into hotel quarantine for 14 days, regardless of their vaccination status.

Travellers from other countries into NSW, Victoria and ACT are now also required to [immediately go to their place of residence or accommodation and isolate for 72 hours pending further health advice](#).

At a press conference on Sunday, Victoria's Chief Health Officer Brett Sutton said vaccines would help provide protection against the Omicron variant, but it would only be known in the coming weeks just how much protection they offered.

He said the emergence of the new variant did not mean Australians were 'back to square one'.

New COVID-19 variant explained

After a new COVID-19 variant emerged in southern Africa, scientists, health officials and the public are concerned, and the World Health Organization is monitoring the situation closely. Here is what we know:

[Read more](#) →



Brett Sutton says Omicron variant is 'likely to be very transmissible'.

Cases confirmed in Europe, Hong Kong

While the Netherlands, Italy, Germany, Hong Kong, Belgium, Austria and the United Kingdom all have confirmed cases of the Omicron variant, the Czech Republic is investigating probable infections.

The Netherlands, alone, has at least 13 confirmed cases.

Testing is underway on the variant but is not yet known how transmissible or how severe the symptoms of the new strain are.

However, case numbers in South Africa have ballooned, and that is believed to be linked to the emergence of the new variant.

International borders close to southern Africa

Many countries including the United States, United Kingdom and [European Union nations](#) have also closed their borders to southern Africa in an effort to reduce the spread of the new variant, which was first detected in South Africa.

[Israel has closed its borders to all foreigners](#), making it the first country in the world to do so.

WHO calls for calm

The WHO and medical experts have warned people not to overreact while studies of the variant are underway.

It made the statement, [after Friday's slump in the markets](#), and urged nations to help developing countries get vaccinated.

Meanwhile, the makers of the AstraZeneca, Pfizer, Moderna and Novavax vaccines said they had plans to adapt their shots to combat the Omicron variant.

The pharmaceutical firms expect to be able to tweak the vaccines to be effective against the new variant within 100 days.



What COVID-19 travel insurance doesn't cover you for (Emilia Terzon)

What you need to know about coronavirus:

- [The symptoms](#)
- [The number of cases in Australia](#)
- [Tracking Australia's vaccine rollout](#)

What do you want to know about COVID-19? How has the pandemic impacted you? Let us know

Email

Category

Ask us a question

We will be in touch if your submission is chosen for further investigation.

First name

Last name

What is your gender?

Mobile number (optional)

State

Postcode

☐ I've read and agree to the ABC's [Terms Of Use](#), [Privacy Collection Statement](#), [Privacy Policy](#), and [Crowdsourcing Collection Statement](#)

☐ I consent to being contacted by ABC journalists for newsgathering/investigation purposes. (optional)

SUBMIT

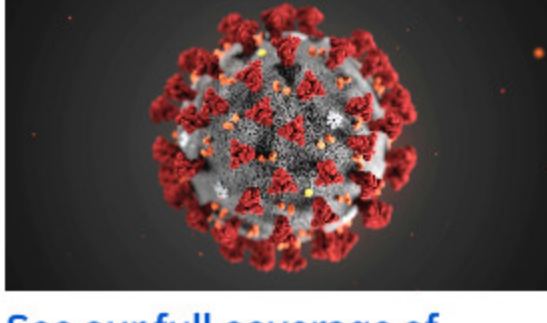
Posted 2h ago

Share [Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [LinkedIn](#) [Reddit](#)

More on:

- AUSTRALIA
- AUSTRIA
- BELGIUM
- BOTSWANA
- COVID-19
- EPIDEMICS AND PANDEMICS
- ESWATINI
- EUROPEAN UNION
- GERMANY
- HONG KONG
- INFECTIOUS DISEASES (OTHER)
- ISRAEL
- ITALY
- LESOTHO
- LOCKDOWN
- MALAWI
- MOZAMBIQUE
- NAMIBIA
- NETHERLANDS
- SEYCHELLES
- SOCIAL DISTANCING
- SOUTH AFRICA
- TRAVEL HEALTH AND SAFETY
- UNITED KINGDOM
- UNITED STATES
- VACCINES AND IMMUNITY
- ZIMBABWE

More on coronavirus



[See our full coverage of coronavirus](#)

Other languages

ABC中文 | 新冠疫情特别报道 →
Pandemic virus corona →

Now Omicron is here in Australia. Experts say there's more we can do to stop COVID

'We don't know a lot about it': Health bosses monitoring Omicron outbreak as new travel ban comes into force

Tracking the vaccine: Victoria hits the 90 per cent double-dose milestone

Australia hits COVID vaccination milestone and climbs the global first jab rankings

There are three vaccines on offer in Australia – here's how effective they are

Top Stories

PM says it is 'too early' to decide if hotel quarantine will be reinstated in face of Omicron variant

How the 'threat of disclosure' could bring Ghislaine Maxwell's sex trafficking trial to a swift end

Live: All the important coronavirus news you need to know

ANALYSIS

Your super could be taxed up to 32 per cent when you die — here's how to avoid it

Third Omicron COVID-19 case 'possibly' found in NSW Premier

'Like the wild west': No protections as homes unfinished after builder goes under

'It's devastating': Tearful Cairns mother learns she'll be sent to the Gold Coast after COVID hotel fire

Ashlie used to help feed the homeless, now at 64 she's homeless herself

ANALYSIS

An experience I deserve: Nas Campanella on preparing for motherhood

Susan Neill-Fraser will find out tomorrow if she can walk free from prison — here's what her appeal is about

F1 great Sir Frank Williams, founder of Williams Racing, dies at 79

Elderly couple rescued amid 5,000 calls for help as floods worsen in NSW

Victoria records 1,007 local COVID-19 cases and three deaths

Australia needs a social housing future fund, Grattan Institute says

China study warns of 'colossal' COVID outbreak if it opens up, with daily cases forecast to exceed 630,000

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021

Here's what you need to know about Hanukkah 2021